MAR 2026

Otago Regional Council

Report this pest

Spartina

Plant Pest

Why is it a pest?

Groups of spartina form thick grassy clumps that spread through rhizomes (underground horizontal stems) or by overground side shoots.

Spartina can establish in estuary environments (where there is a mix of fresh water and salt water), causing a build-up of sediment. This can alter the natural flushing cycles of the estuary habitat, increase the risk of flooding and change the habitat for wading birds and other estuary plants and animals.

In Otago, scattered infestations occur in the Pleasant River estuary (between Waikouaiti and Palmerston), Karitāne estuary, Blueskin Bay, the lower Taieri River and Catlins Lake.

What does it look like?

- **Size:** Commonly grows up to one metre tall.
- **Leaves:** The leaves alternate the sides of the stem and have wide, deep ribs on the upper surface and 1–3 millimetre ligules (membranes that attach the leaves to the stems). The leaves are 5–45 millimetres long by 4–15 millimetres wide. They are smooth to the touch in both directions, unlike other grasses, which feel rough in one direction.
- **Seeds:** There are several long, thick finger-like seed heads at the top of the stems. Seeds fall into the water and float away.
- **Root system:** Rhizomes and fibrous roots with erect stems (4–9 millimetres diameter).
- **Similar species:** In the intertidal zone (the area between high tide and low tide), there is one small native seagrass similar to spartina, Zostera, which can be differentiated by its thin, ribbon-like leaves that lie flat at low tide. Outside of the intertidal zone, other grass species similar to spartina include tall fescue and couch.
- **Habitat:** Shallow saltwater and freshwater environments, particularly estuaries.

Common name:
Spartina, cordgrass

Scientific name:
Spartina anglicus and *Spartina x townsendii*
(also known as *Sporobolus anglicus* and *Sporobolus x townsendii)*

Management programme:
Progressive containment

The progressive containment programme aims to stop a pest from spreading and/or contain it to a certain area.

Report this pest!

If you have seen or suspect the presence of this pest, you **must report** the sighting to us at **orc.govt.nz/reportpests**

Plant Pest

When can I spot it best?

During active growing season between November and March — in particular, when flowering stalks or seed heads are visible.

What are the rules?

To reduce the spread of spartina and minimise or prevent negative effects on economic wellbeing and the environment, everyone in Otago must report spartina infestations to Otago Regional Council.

Spartina is in the progressive containment programme of the Otago Regional Pest Management Plan (2019–2029).

How will we achieve that?

Otago Regional Council carries out regular surveillance in places where spartina is known to be present and works closely with the Department of Conservation to control it. Together, these efforts aim to stop spartina spreading further and reduce its impact on local wetlands and estuaries.

What should I do?

Do not attempt to undertake control of spartina yourself. Report any sightings to Otago Regional Council.

Report this pest

Help us find spartina

You must notify Otago Regional Council if you suspect the presence of this pest.

If you think you've seen it:

- **Note the location**
- **Take a photo** (if possible)
- **Report this pest at orc.govt.nz/reportpests**

For more information, visit **orc.govt.nz/spartina**